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How CIA ousted Jagan with a strike

LONDON, (By Air Mail): In the House of Commons on Tuesday the Prime Minister faces a more than usually leading question. Stan Newens, Labour MP for Epping, will ask:

"Will the Prime Minister make a statement on his policy towards efforts which are being made by the United States Central Intelligence Agency and other United States intelligence organisations to infiltrate and influence organisations which function in British administered territories for purposes of subversion of law and order?"

As a booby trap, the question lacks finesse, and "No... sir" is the most likely, albeit ambiguous answer. But there is more to it than that. Although Mr. Newens himself appears to know nothing of the details he is in fact hinting at a substantial case.

This is the downfall of the Left-wing Jagan Government in the colony of British Guiana (now independent Guyana) in 1964. Inquiries by insight last week made it clear that this was engineered largely by the CIA.

The only cause for a certain amount of Parliamentary unease would seem to be that this Government happened to be in a British colony. And the cover which the CIA used was a London based international trades union secretariat, the Public Services International.

As coups go, it was not expensive: over five years the CIA paid out something over £250,000. For the colony, British Guiana, the result was about 170 dead, untold hundreds wounded, roughly £10 million-worth of damage to the economy and a legacy of racial bitterness.

British Guina, perched on the north east corner of South America, was never one of Britain's happiest colonies. When, in 1953 the first government was elected—under an Indian dentist, Cheddi Jagan—he and his wife, Lena, did seem a trifle Left-wing, but the Colonial Office reasoned—correctly—that he had won not because of his politics but because of his race.

Race has always split the country; 300,000 Indians scattered mainly through the rural areas, 200,000 Africans clustering mainly in the townships, and interlarding them about 100,000 polyglot.

Indians

The Indians voted fairly solidly for the ascetic Left-wing Jagan. The Africans voted equally solidly for Forbes Burnham, an extrovert African lawyer well to the Right

To Britain's intense surprise, Jagan meant his Left-wing words. He moved against the foreign sugar companies—he lasted three months. Then the British Government moved in to quell the uproar flung out Jagan and stayed until 1957. Jagan, saying exactly the same things, won the 1957 elections too.

It began to dawn on everybody—most forcibly upon the Americans looking somewhat apprehensively southward—that nothing short of an upheaval would ever unseat Jagan. The Indian birthrate was just higher.

The gulf between the British and American attitudes to politics becomes starkly apparent at this point. In Whitehall they were vaguely thinking in terms of opposition coalitions. In Washington they were thinking in terms of upheavals. And there was an ideal tool to hand—the Guyanese trade union movement.

With 40,000 members cutting across all races and parties, the local TUC was an admirable ready-made opposition. Fortunately, the two dominating unions were already somewhat anti-Jagan. The sugar workers' union had been dealing with the plantation owners quite successfully without interference from Jagan—and, anyway, though racially mixed, the union supported Forbes Burnham's African party.

Power base

The other power base, the civil servants' union, was anti-Jagan primarily because few of its members were Indians. All that was needed was organisation.

The Public Services International had been in contact with the Guyana Civil Service union since the early fifties. The PSI's British affiliate unions include the Electrical Trades Union, the Transport and General Union, and the Municipal and General. It was, despite that, one of the weaker and less prestigious of the various international networks which exist to export the union know-how of advanced industrial countries to less developed socities.

By 1958 its finances were low, and its stocks were low with its own parent body, the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions. It needed a success of some kind.

The financial crisis was resolved, quite suddenly, by the PSI's main American affiliate union, the Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees. Its boss, Dr. Arnold Zander had, he told the PSI executive, "been shopping", and had found a donor.

The spoils were modest at first—only a couple of thousand pounds in 1958. It was, the kind donor had said, for Latin America. The money went towards a PSI "recruiting drive" in the northern countries of Latin America by one William J. Doherty, junr., a man with some previous acquaintance of the CIA.

The donor was presumably pleased, because next year, 1959, Zander was able to tell the PSI that his union was openin a full time Latin-American section on the PSI's behalf. The PSI was charmed.

The PSI's representative, said Zander, would be Howard McCabe. McCabe, a stocky, bullet-headed American, appeared to have no previous union history, but the PSI liked him When he came to its meetings, he distributed cigarette lighters and photographs of himself doling out food parcels to peasants, The lighters and the parcels were both inscribed, "with the compliments of the PSI."

The full ludicrousness of this situation appears not to have dawned on the PSI. Zander's

union had about 210,000 members at that time, and a monthly income of about £600—barely enough to cover its own expenses. Yet everyone in the PSI knew that the Latin-American operation must be costing every penny of £30,000 a would fix him.

"We did not ask where the money came from", said the secretary of the PSI, Paul Tolfarhn last week, "because I think we all knew."

Jagan finally precipitated his own downfall—seemingly working on the principle that if he did not fix the unions they year.

The catalyst was a Labour Relations Bill, modelled largely on the American Wagner Act. It would have forced Guyanese employers to recognise whatever union the workers chose in a secret ballot. The catch was that, since Jagan could organise the polling areas the balloting was wide open to government gerrymandering.

General strike

The general strike began in April, 1963. Jagan seems to have thought that the unions could hold out a month. It was an expensive miscalculation, and by the tenth week it was Jagan, not the unions, who was desperate.

What Jagan had forgotten was the presence of a stocky, bulletheaded man tirelessly bashing a typewriter in the downtown Georgetown hotel that was the strike headquarters—Howard McCabe, the American representative of the Public Services International of London.

McCabe was providing the bulk of the strike pay. McCabe found the money for distress funds, and for the strikers' daily 15 minutes on the radio and their propaganda, and considerable travelling expenses. All over the world, it seemed brother unions were clubbing together.

It was a touching vision, marred only by the fact that the PSI London office sent less than £2,000 to the strikers. Zander's "kind donor" was putting up nearly all the rest. The best estimate is that the kind donor produced a least £150,000, which reached Mc Cabe from Zander's office.

Jagan was crushed by the longest general strike in history—79 days. Even the mediator sent from London, Robert Willis then general secretary of the London Typographical Society and a man not noted for his mercy in bargaining with newspaper managements, was shocked.

"It was rapidly clear to me that the strike was wholly political," he said. 'Jagan was giving in to everything the strikers wanted, but as soon as he did they erected new demands."

To Colonial Secretary Duncan Sandys, the strike furnished the required proof that Jagan could not run the country. He used it to justify a remarkable constitution which, by splitting up Jagan's voters, made it inevitable that Jagan lose the 1964 elections to Burnham.

Influence

At the time Jagan—and a few of the British Labour Party—complained of CIA influence. But nobody could prove who Zander's "kind donor' was. Some kind of hint emerged later in 1964 when after a particularly rugged election a Brooklyner named Jerry Wurf ousted Zander from the Presidency.

"I went into the offices in 'Washington", Wurf recalls, "and there was this whole floor crawling with clerks and translators, and all manner of people. I said: 'What's all that?' And they said: 'That's your international department' 'Oh, yeah?' I said.' Wurf took a dim view, He had all the locks changed on the doors one night —and the "international department" simply disappeared, as did McCabe.

In February, 1967, Zander confessed that his little union had been heavily financed by the CIA from 1958 to 1964. The "kind donor" was in fact an outfit called the Gotham Foundation—run from a small law office in New York by "a man with a funny sounding name" which Zander does not now recall. The Gotham Foundation, now wound up in the Johnson CIA clean-up is acknowledged to have been a CIA front.